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The Copper Strike of 1968-1969

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The Calumet Division Copper Strike of 1968 – 1969

Introduction

Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula is not a stranger to mining strikes. As a region that was built on the mining industry, funded by dollars coming from distant cities such as Boston and Pittsburgh, the region's contemporary inhabitants have built up a mythos around the blue collar mine workers and their personalities, which are remembered for being as hard as the rock they extracted. With a clear dichotomy between the management and working class citizens of the Keweenaw's mining locations, power struggles emerged in the form of a strike for every generation that worked the Copper Country's abundant lodes. For most people of the region, when one mentions the word "strike", their thoughts immediately gravitate toward the strike of 1913-1914, a subject which has been as valuable as a commodity for the region to exploit as the entire history of mining in the area. However, the infamous strike of 1913-1914 was a midpoint for the story of copper mining in the extreme north of Michigan, and it was the strike of 1968-1969 that would serve as the final chapter. Despite the impact the latter had on the region, it is rarely discussed, and not commemorated in any form at any one of the eleven heritage sites spread across the Keweenaw Peninsula. The strike of 1968-1969 is deserving of a place in the story of Keweenaw Copper Mining due to the drastic toll that it took upon the region, and the way in which it altered the economic, cultural, and physical landscape of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. This is a story about the strike, but on a larger scale, it is about what happened when the largest employer in the region abruptly leaves the area. While the strike was the event that officially ended Calumet's dominance in the Keweenaw's Copper Industry, the trouble began when Universal Oil Products, a much larger company, and one that had little vested interest in

the Keweenaw or its people, purchased Calumet & Hecla. Universal Oil Products was likely never interested in being in the copper mining industry, but instead, seemed to have been interested in another Calumet operation, Wolverine Tube, which is still in operation today under the Universal Oil Products banner.

Calumet and the surrounding communities all share similar history with the mining industry – including the impact that one of the largest copper mining companies, Calumet and Hecla, would have over them. Calumet and Hecla were two separate mining corporations that would merge and become the dominating companies in Michigan’s copper country. Although the initial goal was not to establish a municipality, these locations are often referred to as “company towns” because of the extent to which the company exudes power over their workers. The managerial style known as paternalism was employed in the Keweenaw, as it was in most mining locations around the United States. Paternalism was the “managerial approach and style, where a company’s activities broadly [affect] the lives of employees and their families from cradle to grave”¹. There have been many studies done on company towns, and the practice of paternalism, including Larry Lankton’s **Hollowed Ground**, Arnold Alanen’s **Morgan Park**, Allison Hoagland’s **Mine Towns**, Sarah Cowie’s **The Plurality of Power: An Archaeology of Industrial Capitalism** and Janet Finn’s **Mining Childhood**. These company towns, like any community, are diverse and unique, and find ways to oppose the power coming from their paternal company, but there are many qualities that these towns, including Calumet, share with each other, and at times, struggle with. Mining locations such as Calumet experience pluralistic power, a concept that “acknowledges that power can be experienced in numerous manifestations, such as domination, resistance, hegemony, hierarchy, authority, intersectional identities,

¹ Lankton, 2010

collaboration, collusion, and creative action”². The strict lines of power were not only drawn between manager and worker, but also between genders and generations. Even during strikes, “when their labor was particularly critical...women were usually funneled into domestic roles – cooking in strike kitchens, distributing clothing to families, organizing other wives, rather than utilized in policy making or public roles”³

The Michigan Copper Strike of 1913-1914 was a rare case of women having seemingly played a front seat role, thanks in part to the legends that have been generationally passed down. Annie Clemenc, a Slovenian immigrant to the Copper Country, has been dubbed the “Joan of Arc of Calumet” for her activism in the labor disputes of 1913-1914. It was the original goal of this study to seek out the role of women in the final copper mining strike to take place in Michigan, but it was soon evident that a more immediate goal would need to be telling the general story of the strike, as it was not well archived, and the community either did not remember it, or they did not want to talk about it. Unlike in other strikes, such as the 1934 copper strike in Butte Montana, where children were able to recall small details to interviewers, such as the fact that “some children found in the division of us and them confounding and [that] they struggled to grasp their parent’s hostility toward those who ‘went beyond the fence’ during the strike”⁴, the younger generations in Michigan’s Copper Country were surprised to hear that there was a strike during the late sixties.

When asked about the strike of 1968-1969, a worker from another division of Universal Oil Products, the company that bought out C&H as well as all of its subsidiaries in 1967, stated

² Cowie, 2011

³ Mercier, 2011

⁴ Finn, 2012

“I really don’t know anything about that...I really don’t know anything about the grievances”⁵.

There were not horror stories reminiscent of the Italian Hall Tragedy, there were not icons such as Annie Clemenc, or instigators like Charles Moyer. The strike of 1968-1969 was not even remembered for what it eventually caused – the end of copper mining in Michigan – that is attributed to simply running out of copper by most. The forced deindustrialization of the community was believed to be a lack of resources by some, and not as a casualty of the increasing globalization of industrial capitalism⁶. For a deeper understanding of the strike, the sale of Calumet & Hecla to Universal Oil Products should be viewed as a catalyst.

Universal Oil Products Acquires Calumet & Hecla

The first leg of the strike began on May 10th, 1968, a mere nine days after Universal Oil Products of Des Plaines, Illinois completed its purchase of the Goliath of the Copper Country, Calumet & Hecla, for \$123 million dollars. Universal Oil Products main commercial activity at the time was “providing research, development, and engineering services to the petroleum and petrochemical industries”⁷ hence the name Universal Oil. The merger was Universal Oil’s first move into the mining and metal fabricating business, and according to the then president of Universal Oil Products, M.P. Venema, the company was looking into going into the “highly important fields of nuclear energy, desalination and thermal water pollution control”⁸. This was an area of business they were most likely hoping to penetrate via the Wolverine Tube Inc., branch of Calumet & Hecla, the most profitable sector of the corporation at the time, and one that produced heat resistant copper tubing, a product that was needed in energy

⁵ Hein, 2002

⁶ See Appendix B, regarding Copper Mining in South America

⁷ WSJ, 1967

⁸ New York Times, 1967

production, refrigeration, and the automotive industry. Along with the acquisition of Wolverine Tube Inc., from Calumet & Hecla, Universal Oil also obtained valuable contracts from the United States Department of Defense. In 1970, however, Venema admitted there were other motives for the merger, saying they were fearing a corporate raid, and “together, [they] were less likely to be taken over”⁹. Records show that in the mid-1960s, Universal Oil Products was desperate in its efforts to expand and diversify, and the merger with Calumet & Hecla was a “[continuation] of heavy acquisition activity, [following the acquisition of] a twenty five percent stake in Abcor Inc, a Cambridge Massachussets, company specializing in development of separation and purification processes and techniques” and also “Pellar Laboratories, a Chicago formulator of spices and seasonings, meat flavors, and dehydrated sauces and gravies”¹⁰. Following the purchase of Calumet & Hecla, they would also obtain “REF Dynamics Corp...a manufacturer of aircraft galleys and test equipment”¹¹. It was in late December of 1967 that the merger was announced, an article from the Wall Street Journal reported that as of September 1967, Calumet & Hecla had only managed to squeeze out a small profit of about 4 million on sales of 108 million¹².

Shareholders in Calumet & Hecla were the real winners of the merger, as “[u]nder the terms of the merger...Calumet & Hecla’s holders will get twice the number of Universal [Oil Product] shares originally scheduled”¹³. For Universal Oil Products, the value of the mining division of Calumet & Hecla was not much of a gain, as “C&H’s Michigan Mines produced only about 20% of the copper its fabricating plants chewed up [and] the company had

⁹ Forbes, 1970

¹⁰ Chemical & Engineering News, 1968

¹¹ Chemical & Engineering News, 1968

¹² WSJ, 1967

¹³ WSJ, 1968

little in the way of long-term commitments from other copper producers to supply the metal as the so-called producer price, [which was] about fifty-six cents a pound”¹⁴. This resulted in “Calumet & Hecla [usually earning] less than 10% a year on its stockholders’ equity vs the more than 15% UOP was earning at the time”¹⁵. The value of this information to the story of the Strike of 1968-1969 was how little the Calumet Division would have meant to Universal Oil Products; when it was time to negotiate with their miners, why would they negotiate their business into even less profits? Carl Gasperich, a miner for Calumet and Hecla, and eventual member of the bargaining committee for the union when the strike would hit, recalls the arrival of Universal Oil Products.

“[T]his oil company had no intentions of continuing this mining operation... That is not just only me saying it. They purchased for the value of the land. Basically, that is the main reason.”¹⁶

Trouble at the Kingston Mines

On May 10th, 1968, over 200 men would walk off site at the Kingston Mine, near Ahmeek, Mi. At the time, the Kingston Mine was the most active shaft for the Calumet Division, employing over six-hundred of their one –thousand employees. The walkout occurred after a man was injured when thrown from the mancage, the mechanism that takes men in and out of the mine shaft. The general manager of the Calumet Division, C.H. Suter claimed “[t]he stoppage arose as the result of employees objecting to the proper use of the signaling system”¹⁷.

¹⁴ Forbes, 1970

¹⁵ Forbes, 1970

¹⁶ Gasperich, 2014

¹⁷ Daily Mining Gazette, 1968

He continued “This is the first and most reliable system of signaling that should be installed in a mine”¹⁸ and explained to the Daily Mining Gazette, the local newspaper, that:

[The] U.S. Beureau of Mines also requires that a standard code of hoisting signals be adopted and used at each mine. The proposed Michigan State Mine Safety Code also carries this provision....it is an inescapable fact that the improper manner in which these [systems] have been used in the Kingston Mine appointed to learn that misuse of the two systems have been allowed. For the benefit of everyone concerned, we cannot knowingly or deliberately permit or impose an unsafe signaling system (Daily Mining Gazette, 1968)

Carl Gasperich tells the story quite differently in 2014 than Suter did in 1968, insisting that the bell was not working properly:

...they just came up a few years before, with a safety device, that was bell mounted in the mine car, which you went down and up in, and boss sat up there and that bell was hooked up there somewhere with the cable so if something happened with the shaft, and it did happen a few times, he could pull that bell. Say there was a timber in the shaft, for example, and that

¹⁸ Daily Mining Gazette

did happen...he saw that coming, and the guys at the bottom would know because the lights would shine right on it, and you know, and they would say "oh wait awhile, there is something in the shaft, pull it down" and the boss would always sit down by the bell, and pull the bell, and the engineers would get the signal and stop immediately. Well, the bell became inoperative for some reason rather. And...Well, they refused to fix it. See, this was getting close to the time of contracts running out, and already there were some bad feelings floating around between management and labor and the union. And as much as we insisted on getting the bell fixed, repairing the bell, they wouldn't do nothing about it.¹⁹

Miners had been expressing concerns over the recent merger, and the appointment of new managers, such as Suter, to which Suter said:

Together, we have an interest and future in the Calumet Division. One cannot exist without the other. Divided as we seem to be today, is prejudicial to all"²⁰.

The Daily Mining Gazette reported that the workers returned to the Kingston Mine shortly, knowing that their contracts were due for renewal in August of the same year, and they hoped to address their concerns over the signaling system along with concerns over wages; Carl

¹⁹ Gasperich, 2014

²⁰ Daily Mining Gazette, 1968

remembers this differently, though he does agree that the miners returned to the site, he is maintaining that the miners, knowing their life was at risk, were much more defiant in their initial protest, and refused to go underground, saying:

So finally, the majority of us working there, this shift and this shift, I don't remember the exact number that was working there, but the man car held 39 guys, including the boss. So...majority of us agreed, well, if they aren't going to, this is under the safety rules, we refuse to go underground unless they repair the bell. They refused to repair the bell. We reported for work every day, there was a few guys that did go down...and we had names for them you too you know...I don't have to tell you what they were, they aren't very nice (laughs). But they kept going down, a few guys, not too many, it got less and less actually. But up until the time that the contract ran out and the strike came to be, they wouldn't fix the bell, and we refused to work. But we were told, we had a good attorney, and good representation by the Union, but the higher ups in our union said to continue to report to work, make sure you do, at the time, stay there until the shift goes down, and ask the question everyday "is the bell repaired?" and if they tell you no, you go

home. If they fixed the bell, well you were ready, put our mining clothes on out of our locker and we'd go down. So that is pretty much what happened right until the end.²¹

Universal Oil Products was not interested in negotiating the signaling system, as they saw it perfectly safe and up to standards for use, and made the miners aware that it would be an issue for the courts to decide²². While this first leg of the strike was short-lived, it was not without bitterness; after a few days off work, the Calumet Division reported "air brake hoses on 49 ore cars at the Calumet Division of the Calumet & Hecla Corporation were found slashed"²³. Carl Gasperich fondly recalls other acts of disobedience by the miners:

I was over at 13, and the boss there was swearing at us and hollering at us "go back to work, go back to work". We ended up throwing rocks at him. Bounced them off the dry house. (laughs). A better one yet, we picketed in Huebell. Here comes a train, with a boxcar. It wanted to back into one of the plants. It was baloney. We stood in our tracks - it was copper range railroad, not C&H, because C&H was down, and he, uh, respected our picket line. We weren't going to move anyhow. You run over us, you run over us. So we were pretty staunch group, I will say. And then uh, I thought anybody that worked for that outfit, rightfully so...you

²¹ Gasperich, 2014

²² Daily Mining Gazette, 1968

²³ Daily Mining Gazette, 1968

know...the base rate of a miner when the mines closed,
 the contract was out in august of 1968 ,\$.41 1/2 cents
 an hour, was job cost 14, and that was a miner. ²⁴

August 22nd, 1968 – Negotiations Fail, The Strike Officially Begins

Requesting wages equal to the workers at the White Pine Mine (Daily Mining Gazette, 1968), United Steelworkers of America Local 4312 opted to go on strike when the Calumet Division refused to grant the raise. The lack of an agreement was not a surprise however, and according to an interview with Peter Capello, a former mine-manager, “there were some hard feelings between the Union and company execs”²⁵. The executives from Universal Oil made what they said was the largest wage increase ever offered by an Industrial Company in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, which was “a 55 cent raise over a three year period, plus increase in hospitalization, and pension benefits”, though the Local 4312 representatives retorted with “Our workers won’t accept a contract that is not equal to the present one at White Pine” (Smith, 1969). On August 30th of 1968, the Union rejected a raise of \$1.03/hour over three years by a vote of 698-113. A statement from the UOP board was released that said “operations of the division are under intensive review”²⁶. Certainly these were not the words of a company concerned with the mining operations of a company they had just purchased three months prior for 123.5 million dollars, it was clear to many in the community that the copper mines were never the selling point for the Universal Oil Product executives.

When Oral Historian Jo Urion asked Peter Capello if he was sympathetic with the Union, he is quick to state that he was not sympathetic with them:

²⁴ Gasperich, 2014

²⁵ Capello, 2003

²⁶ UOP Board Minutes.. Calumet and Hecla Company Collection., MS-002. Box 087. MTU Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Michigan Technological University, Michigan.

Well, I wasn't really sympathetic with them. I think they, the company made an offer, and it wasn't that, I suppose it never is that good of an offer, but they wouldn't accept it, and I think they didn't think the company was going to close up, but I guess they were wrong, they closed it up.²⁷

It would seem that over the nine month duration of the strike, the Union and the workers never expected the strike to end in the closure of the mines. Had they known, they would have likely been more eager to accept an offer, but they continued to hold out, believing their value to be greater than it was to the company, similarly to countless companies in the history of industrial capitalism which saw their workers and the safety of their workers as negative externalities; they had purchased C&H as a means to diversify their portfolio, and the mines, while they did supply necessary copper, were not profitable, and an expendable part of the operation.

As the strike marched on, it took its toll on the economy of the Keweenaw Peninsula. In November of 1968, only three months into the strike, the effects were already being felt, and Floyd Granroth, then President of the Calumet-Laurium-Keweenaw Chamber of Commerce told the Milwaukee Journal "It looks like a dull Christmas"²⁸. The article pointed out that a strike of 1,000 workers would not be strongly felt in most areas, but in an area such as Calumet, it was devastating. The Calumet Division was "the only mining firm [still] operating in this portion of the Upper Peninsula, [and was] the area's largest employer...[with] a \$750,000 monthly payroll and [landholdings that make it] the biggest taxpayer in Houghton and

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Milwaukee Journal, 1968

Keweenaw counties”²⁹. Businesses across the counties were hurting from the four-million dollars that the area lost in wages during the strike. Houghton and Keweenaw counties reported welfare case increases of thirty and fifty percent, respectively, exhausting the welfare fund of Houghton county within six months, and bank loan delinquency was up two-hundred-seventy-five percent³⁰. Automobile sales crashed due to people saying “they won’t buy until after the strike”³¹. Hospitals also suffered, as many workers lost insurance when they went on strike, and could not afford medical treatment or surgeries³². Many young and skilled workers simply left the area, not wanting to wait for the strike to end.

The miners were able to secure unemployment benefits with the aid of lawyers such as Gordon Jaskalainen, then of the Law firm of Wisti and Jaskalainen out of Hancock, and a satellite office in Ahmeek. The law firm had a unique and hostile relationship with C&H, dating back to 1957, which will be examined later. Carl credits the victory in the battle for unemployment solely to attorney Jaskalainen:

And we signed up for unemployment. We were told to do that. And we did. We were told by the lady at the unemployment office, you're wasting your time coming here, don't even bother coming. We signed right through, because the strike was on then, and this was pretty long time that we were off with this bell, I don't remember exactly you know, when you get almost 82 your mind don't work so good no more. So uh...we continue to sign up, long story short, Gordy Jaaskelainen was our attorney, and he proceeded to go through all of his paperwork and stuff and follows suit

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Daily Mining Gazette, 1969

³¹ Milwaukee Journal, 1968

³² Daily Mining Gazette, 1968

against the company, and unemployment, we received every bit of unemployment that we had coming...And listen, that man did a great deal of good for miners that were hurt seeking compensation that the company on some cases refused to pay, kind of just said no, that ain't serious enough, some excuse...he won them cases...many of them. Gordy did a lot of good for the working people up here.³³

Some residents began to express anger toward the Union, claiming “[they] never really had a vote on the company’s offer”³⁴. It was noted in January of 1969 that “[m]any striking employees [said] they wish to return to work, [and were] are tired of being idle”³⁵. Six months into the strike, showing signs of the end, “[Universal Oil Products] made a surprise move [and gave] minimum explanation, [when they] withdrew its more than six month old bargaining table offer from the stalemated negotiations with striking local 4312 of the United Steelworkers of America”³⁶. For the duration of the nine-month strike, Universal Oil Products would only offer one settlement, and the Local 4312 rejected it, believing if they held out they would win. Feelings within the community grew bitter, and divisions in the community increased. Carl Gasperich recalls the hostile environment:

The merchants were against us, even a church person was against us. That’s Reverend Langsett, if you ever know that gentleman. Not picking on any religions or anything, but he was uh - he was down there, scouting around, saying "go back to work, what are you asking

³³ Gasperich, 2014

³⁴ Daily Mining Gazette, 1969

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

for, look at your jobs, look at what you're going to do to the community". Hey! People call him too. Workers call him too. Especially when you work that kind of deal on underground work. Some of those merchants should have taken a ride down there and see what it looks like down there, you know.³⁷

Sensing the end, Carl and his fellow miners did not sit by idly. Many went out and found new work, often at the nearby White Pine mine. The miners who represented the union did not have it so easy, however, according to Carl:

The company, in a lot of people's minds yet to this day, was a good guys, and we were bad guys. Because we shut the mines down. No! We didn't shut the mines down. C&H closed the mines down and sold out to universal oil products. And here is the best of them all...the guys on the bargaining committee, experienced miners, not just miners, in this case, 3 of us miners, went into iron country, white pines seeking employment. They said "no". We were experienced men, don't forget. No...we went to iron country to. No. So...remember, this was 68, 69...and things were going pretty good down in that way. You know, white pine was going good, and they took a lot of men from up here, and I would've went there if they hired me.

³⁷ Gasperich, 2014

Finally, we made a few more trips down there. They said save your guys the bother of coming, they were good enough to tell us that our names were on the list. Blackballed. That is some bullshit. That is the truth. Pardon my language. That is what really hurt.³⁸

In the early days of April 1969, “Universal Oil Products Company announced that it [was] preparing to close down its Calumet division because of an inability to reach agreement”³⁹. This announcement must have been soul-crushing for the community, as they immediately began to look for ways to move forward, working alongside UOP. Following a television statement by Calumet village president Lawrence Oinas, the Calumet Village council felt the need to have their own resolution known to the public, releasing a statement that read:

The village council, mindful of the fact that the present strike between Local 4312, United Steelworkers Union, and the Calumet Division of Universal Oil Products Company is strictly a labor-management dispute, but further being mindful of the fact that it would be in the best interest of the entire community to see the existing dispute terminated in an amicable manner, go on record as stating that it is the hope and desire of the council that the bargaining committees of both the union and their company will consider entering into new and meaningful negotiations in an

³⁸ Gasperich, 2014

³⁹ The Daily Mining Gazette, 1969

attempt to avert the shutdown of the company's operations in the Copper Country, and that the bargainers will further seek the advice and consultations of any and all local, state, and federal groups and agencies who may be in a position to offer sound and realistic advice to avert the forecasted shutdown of the company's operations⁴⁰.

Universal Oil Products was no longer interested in what the Union representatives or the community had to say. On April 10th, 1969, "an official termination of operations announcement was made by Universal Oil Products"⁴¹. This was the end of copper mining on the Keweenaw Peninsula, but it is a date that has been forgotten by many. There is not a memorial that commemorates the end, only remnant clippings of the newspaper article that made the declaration. The statement made by Universal Oil Products reflected that the end was in large part due to what they believed was the stubborn nature of the Union:

The shutdown is effective April 9, 1969. It follows issuance of a statement last week that prolonged strike conditions by the United Steelworkers, Local 4312, since August [22] 1968, coupled with the absence of serious negotiations could lead to this final action. The division's 1,200 employees were notified of this termination of operations.⁴²

⁴⁰ Daily Mining Gazette, 1969

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

The community did not stop fighting for their company when the announcement was made. It is apparent from ads and articles run in the Daily Mining Gazette in April and May of 1969 that the fight was now drawing out between political parties, perhaps in an end-game of assigning blame. Even at the state level, Michigan Governor Milliken remained involved with trying to end the strike and keep Universal Oil Products operating in Michigan. Nine days after the closure was announced, he made the statement:

It is difficult to be very optimistic concerning possibility of settlement in this lengthy situation or to feel that major change will come from a single meeting. However I am encouraged by the apparent good faith of both sides and the willingness of both top level management and union representatives to confer...This situation has gone beyond the tragic point for too many people in the Calumet area. The strike both in economic and human dignity, has exacted a heavy toll. Work has still not resumed and in fact, there is a great danger that the entire Calumet and Hecla may close. Because the present situation has brought such hardship to hundreds of Michigan families, I deeply hope that those involved in the Monday meeting will do all they possibly can to successfully resolve the issues.⁴³

⁴³ Daily Mining Gazette, 1969

Shortly after the meetings in Lansing, Union representatives and representatives from Universal Oil were invited to Washington D.C. The White House had been involved with copper mining disputes for nearly two years, as they had often intervened with the lengthy strike that occurred in Butte, Montana in 1967-1968. As the Vietnam war raged on, the government and their Department of Defense were in need of copper products, such as the heat resistant copper tubing made by Wolverine Tube Inc. Reacting to the strike in Butte, President Lyndon B. Johnson stated “the shortage of the copper resulting from the strike [was] having a substantial impact upon the national economy and the country’s balance of payments...it [was] also having a devastating effect on national defense activities”⁴⁴. Of eleven local union representatives invited to the Washington meeting, only one, Sylvio Guisfiredi actually attended, since he was “[successful] in making a plane reservation, whereas the other members of his party were detained due to heavy airline reservations”⁴⁵. Upon his return, “Guisfiredi had little to say relative to the results of the Washington meet except to indicate that the situation still is serious and that much work yet must be accomplished”⁴⁶. Of course, as the area reflects today, nothing more was accomplished, and the end of copper mining was a realization many did not want to accept. The Calumet division was over, and Universal Oil Products left the region in shambles, and would continue to deliver harsh blows over the next half decade as legal disputes over taxes would soon deem the land worthless in the eyes of the State of Michigan.

After the Strike

After the strike of 1968-1969 and the copper mining industry that built the communities of the Keweenaw was officially over, the residents had to find ways to move on and support the community, like many deindustrialized communities, it felt hopeless. For many

⁴⁴ The Daily Mining Gazette, 1968

⁴⁵ Daily Mining Gazette, 1969

⁴⁶ Ibid

today, it still does. Dolores Capello remembers the end of the strike and the hardships that people faced:

There were a lot of hard feelings. People were distraught because they lost their jobs. Most of the salaried people went on to get good jobs at Michigan Tech and other places in the Houghton-Hancock area. There wasn't too much up here. And with the hourly people, they felt they had to, some were just so close to getting their pensions, some lost them after working many many years for the company. Some didn't get anything, because they didn't have the right qualifications to get that pension. They had to have, let me think, now. They had to have fifteen years' service. Oh, dear. Fifteen years' service, I believe, and they had to be over forty-five years of age when the mine closed. So, some missed out, you know. They could have been working since they were twenty years old, and at forty-five, they'd still, you know, if they were forty-four, they didn't get anything.⁴⁷

After over 100 years in the mining industry, the Keweenaw Peninsula had to move on. Universal Oil Products, despite attempts by the community to help find a mine firm to work the loads for

⁴⁷ Capello, 2003

the Des Plaines, Illinois company, began to sell the land, and make record profits. Despite these massive gains, they did not want to pay the massive tax on the lands and other property that they still held. Over the course of 1972-1975, they engaged in over a dozen lawsuits against the communities which they formerly did business in; Osceola, Calumet, and Torch Lake. With landholdings of over 37.65 acres in Osceola, including lakefront, Universal Oil argued that the True Cash Value of their holdings was a mere \$2,180, versus the \$46,800 claimed by Osceola. The numbers were similar in both Calumet and Torch Lake, and every year, UOP appealed.⁴⁸ Circuit Court Judge Bill Condon declared that the matter was one that must be addressed by the Michigan Tax Tribunal, and the case was reinstated in Lansing on October 16th, 1974.⁴⁹ While not fully agreeing with either party, the tribunal was much closer to the number put forth by UoP, stating “a disadvantage of the property is that its location prevents any present industrial development”, adding “the Keweenaw Peninsula, having experienced a collapse of its principal major industry, copper mining, is now without an industrial basis on which to predicate further development”⁵⁰. And with that ruling, the Keweenaw was deemed near worthless by the State of Michigan, at least, as far as industry and the taxes associated with them goes. The true cash value declared by the tax tribunal for Universal Oil’s land holdings was declared to be \$5,620 for 1972, 1973 and 1974, \$41,180 less than what Osceola had originally anticipated, and a loss of \$123,540 over the three year period⁵¹. In one case, Calumet Township was victorious, however, the amount of money that Judge Condon ruled was coming their way, \$555.87, was rather insignificant compared to the \$304,000 lost in another battle.⁵² This small victory was thanks to the fact that Calumet “was not served with process within the period of time set forth in G.C.R.

⁴⁸ Circuit Court for the Country of Houghton, Case No. 2370

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Michigan Tax Tribunal, 12-7-1974

⁵¹ See Fig 1.

⁵² Houghton County Circuit Court, Case No. 2279

102.5”⁵³. While many of these cases delivered major blows to the tax bases of these small villages and townships, in 1973, many of the tax disputes were “amicably settled”, and the data is not available in the court records. However, the amount assessed by the townships and the disputed amount was available, allowing for projections to be made in Fig. 2, based upon the percentages of the Osceola case.⁵⁴ These projections were calculated at 12% of what Universal Oil Products disputed, resulting in substantial losses for all three townships. In every case, the township or village was represented by Gordon Jaskalainen, allowing for these tax disputes to serve as a bookend to his eighteen year battle with Calumet and Hecla.⁵⁵

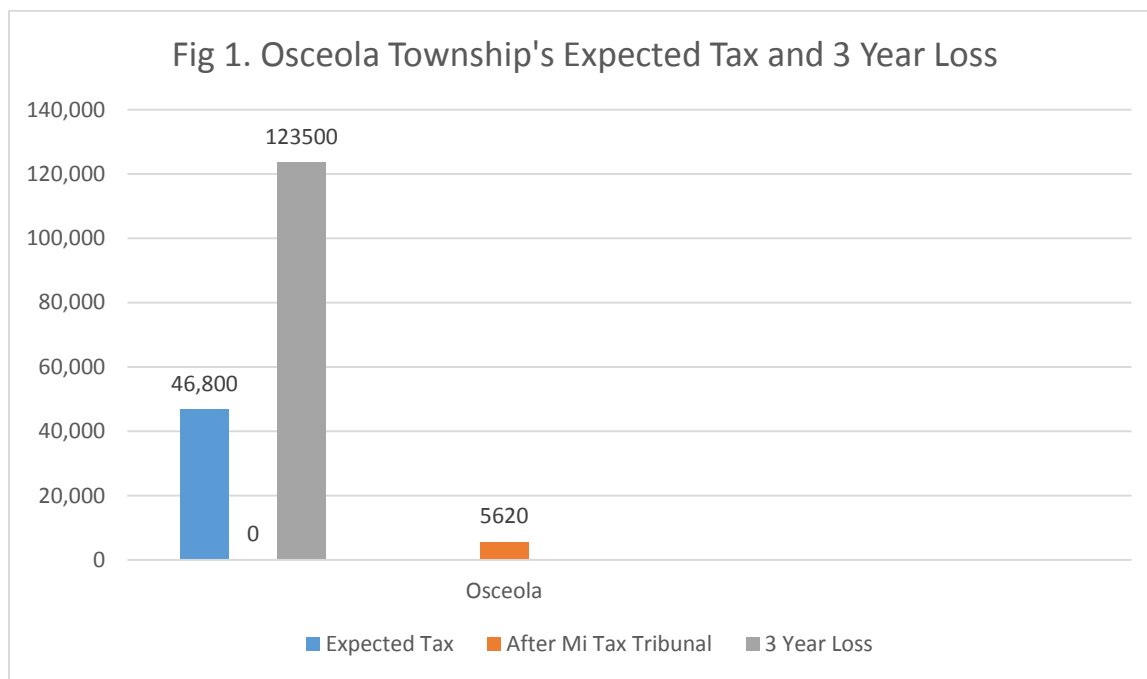


Fig 1.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ See Fig 2. Data from Houghton County Circuit Court, Case No. 2132, 2133, and 2372

⁵⁵ See Appendix A

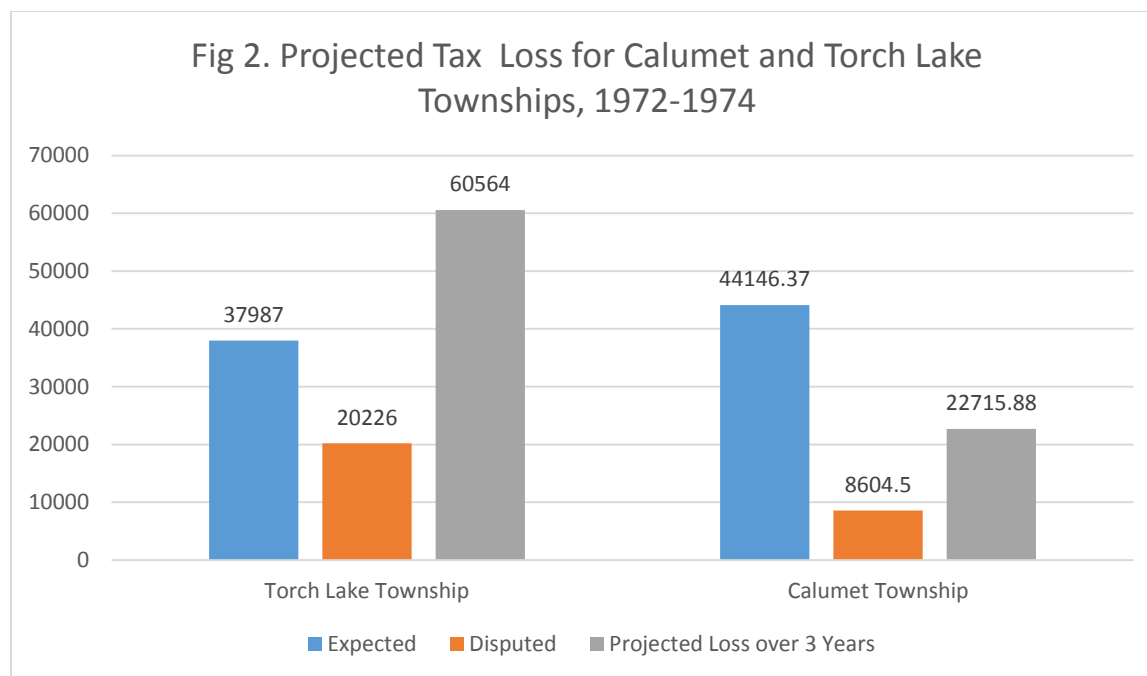


Fig 2.

The companies were also unable to assist the community with their request to allow a third party to work the mines because the law stated that their issues with the union must be settled first, something they were no longer willing to do. Many workers went to White Pine, many people left, and many people endured the poverty. Some insisted that mining would return, and stand by the claim that it would be feasible to this day. Universal Oil Products did lease briefly to a company by the name of Homestake Mining in 1970 through 1972. Carl was able to obtain work there briefly, and sees the last shaft he worked on as a viable option for future copper mining in the region:

Then Homestake came in and bought out and [untranslatable] the mining captain, good over there, that Tommy Rose, mining captain, and a lot of the guys I worked with, a lot of the guys I worked with,

said why don't you call, my nickname, Harv, Harv Gasperich, experienced miner, he is sitting at home, waiting for a job. You know. Well, there was somebody over there, I ain't mentioning no names, but there was one of them, and he was a boss, and he uh, he said just, stay clear of that guy. He is a union man. A hard ass union man. Well, you didn't need a union with a good company! With Homestake, they had an incentive program on their own. Give us miners, and boy were they a good company to work for...Billy Colby, a local guy, he...he tried to get her going again. He even called me personally, and said "would you come and work?" And I said, "most certainly". I says "most certainly. you won't have to worry about getting miners I said, there are good miners available". But that never panned out, and he had some loans and everything, and there was some dewatering done, and this and that too, but you know...it never, it never sadly panned out. There is good metal down there yet, boy, I'll tell ya.[00:29:06] One of the last shifts I worked, a guy from Lake Linden called, Earl Kumpf, we were drilling what we call shaft pillars out there, and that is a block of ground, and it is usually about 300 feet,

from the shaft in you leave that. That is called a shaft pillar. That is supporting your main artery up and down, the main shaft, up and down. North and shaft, you know, your double shafts. And we're drilling in that one anyway, this was at the 36th level, and we were in the vein, and it was so wide, in there, i judge that vein to be probably 12 - 14 feet wide, as normally - we would drill three in a row. A top, a middle, and a bottom. In there, we were drilling for - to take that out. It was damn rich. I'm telling ya. You went in there after a blast, and picture a night like this, and shine in on that broken dirt, it just glistened like a jewelry shop. So a geologist came in, that one day we were during the day shift, they always came in the day shift...so he came in, and naturally we stopped to talk to him. He was looking around you know...boy, it looks pretty rich eh? What do you give it? You are here everyday, you see this everyday. You know...I said, well, 200 lbs to the ton, I'd say. He said "plus", now that is rich, that is rich. Cuz the mining company used to say if we could get fifteen pound rock, fifteen pounds a ton, they would make her go. Imagine what 200 plus is doing. Its still there. Its still there. It ain't going nowhere.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Gasperich, 2014

Even if the copper is there, mining seems unlikely. The Keweenaw Peninsula had to now reinvent itself as a deindustrialized community, a part of the story that is still in progress.

Conclusion

The Strike of 1968-1969 is not remembered by many people in Michigan's Copper Country, though it should be. When approached for interviews, most people claim they do not remember it, or they have something resentful to say about the union, but refuse to go into details. Historians must make the community feel comfortable in talking about the events of the strike in order to get them talking. Like the strike of 1913-1914, people will talk and share their stories if they feel that this is part of their story and an event to be remembered for generations to come. They must see that there is an eagerness from the people who did not witness it to understand what happened. The strike ended the story of copper mining in the Keweenaw, and for that, it is culturally significant. As a strike that garnered attention from both the state and national levels, there is likely to be more information stored in archives outside of the Copper Country. The archival records of Universal Oil Products and Wolverine Tube have not been accessed in the preparation of this paper, and would likely prove to be useful in shedding more light on the fairly recent, but poorly remembered, event that shut down an entire industry. Wolverine Tube appears to have been the primary interest in Universal Oil's acquisition of the Calumet properties, with the value of the land itself being an additional lucrative enterprise, the mining was viewed as a problem from the very beginning of their ownership. Business records for Universal Oil Products, from 1959-1985, can be found at the Harvard Business School in the Lehman Brother's Collection. While much has been done, further research and oral histories should be conducted, as many of the people referenced in the stories are still alive and available

to elaborate on what happened. This includes Gordon Jaskalainen, and Reverend Bob Langsett. Unfortunately, many people who represented Universal Oil Products and the Calumet Division have passed. The strike of 1968-1969 is deserving of a place in the story of Keweenaw Copper Mining due to the drastic toll that it took upon the region, and the way in which it altered the economic, cultural, and physical landscape of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula.

Appendix A: Gordon Jaskalainen 18 Year Battle With C&H

Gordon Jaskalainen was born in Keweenaw County, and left for just a brief period of time, to attend the UofM, followed by the Detroit College of Law, where he received his law degree. He returned in 1956, opening an office in Ahmeek, and called himself the “attorney of Keweenaw County” – a fitting title, since he was the only lawyer with an office in the entire county. He opened his office in the old Keweenaw Bottling Works, the company that his father owned and operated. His father, Paddy Jaskalainen, was head of the Keweenaw County Democrat's Party, a position that would later be held by Gordon, and then by his sister, Jacqueline.

In 1957, Jaskalainen joined a firm with Andrew Wisti, and opened an office in Hancock. They filed suit against C&H with one Ellen Mottonen as the plaintiff. Her husband had

worked at C&H, and suffered a heart attack in 1955. Jaskelainen claimed “compensation benefits for the widow because her husband, Raymond Mottonen, died from a heart attack, and there was a causal relationship between his death and employment”⁵⁷. The case would go before the Michigan Supreme Court in 1960, and Mrs. Mottonen was awarded \$15,000, plus interest of \$772.43 and reimbursement of funeral costs.⁵⁸ The ruling of the Supreme Court “set a new precedent to be followed in workmen’s compensation cases of this nature by its action”⁵⁹. On September 19th, 1960, the Daily Mining Gazette would run an article titled “Hancock Law Firm Wins A 3 Year Legal Battle” that would set off a serious of million dollar suits and a bizarre claim of conspiracy. C&H was not pleased with the outcome of the case, nor were they pleased that the news media was advertising the victory of Jaskalainen for Mottonen, in fear that others would file similar suits, and claimed that Jaskalainen conspired with John Rice of the Daily Mining Gazette to have the article ran. Paul Dashine, then President and General Manager for C&H, wrote an editorial to the Daily Mining Gazette, where he questioned the ethics of the article in question. A witness for C&H would later claim they saw Jaskalainen in the office of John Rice on September 18th, 1960, the day before the article ran, and they were sure it was him due to “signature Homburg hat”. Jaskalainen and his partner, Wisti, both filed separate suits of \$1 million each against C&H for defamation of character. Jaskalainen claimed he would not purchase the hat in question until one month after the date of the stated meeting, and was able to provide when, where, and from whom he purchased the hat in question. All of this information was published in another local paper, the Copper Country News, which was published by Northland Publishing, a company that Jaskalainen and Wisti both served on the board of⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ Daily Mining Gazette 1960

⁵⁸ Houghton County Circuit Court, Case No. 12721

⁵⁹ Daily Mining Gazette, 1960

⁶⁰ Wisti, Andrew. Calumet and Hecla Company Collection., MS-002. Box 087, folder 8. MTU Archives & Copper

Jaskalainen and Wisti both claim that C&H lawyer Norman McLean, as well as C&H management, had developed “an agnostic attitude toward them and their clients”⁶¹.

Jaskalainen would continue in his career to fight against C&H, with the miners, for unemployment, and for the villages and townships, for tax revenue.

Appendix B: Copper Found Elsewhere For Less

Like most industries, Copper Mining in the United States was suffering from the effects of globalization. By 1968, Calumet and Hecla was a mere shell of what it once was, and much of the industry was focused on the companies owned by Anaconda in Montana. The Copper Mines in Butte were producing significantly more copper than Calumet, and the strike that took place there in 1967 took a large toll on the community, as well as the nation, which was relying on the copper from Butte for war time production. With prices fixed during the war, the price of copper in the United States was “lower than the prevailing world market prices”⁶². Companies like Anaconda, who were by the 1950s profiting more from South American mines than their North American, were likely to focus more attention on the global market than the

Country Historical Collections, Michigan Technological University, Michigan.

⁶¹ Copper Country News, 1960

⁶² Finn, J. (1998). Mining History. *Tracing The Vein* (). University of California Press: Berkeley.

United States. Anaconda also had more control over their properties in Chile, where they entered the scene in the late 1920s, at a time when Chile was first forming a democratic government. The major corporation entering the developing nation at such a critical time caused was Janet Finn described as a “compromised democracy, in which the Chilean government contested and acquiesced to the demands of a powerful corporation”⁶³. The strikers in Butte were always well aware that their parent company had interests in another part of the world, where labor was cheaper, and the sale of the product was less regulated, perhaps leading the Union in Butte to be more on their toes, and crafty in their negotiations (they also organized as a union much earlier than Calumet). After Anaconda began operations in Chile, there was an “ever present threat to abandon Butte”, which led to an arrangement between the Union and the company in 1934 “that allowed union workers to maintain the mines for the duration of future strikes”⁶⁴. It was not a permanent safeguard, but it is one that provided a sense of security to both parties, and a similar agreement in Calumet would have likely forced Universal Oil Products to continue negotiations with the strikers of 1968-1969, instead of abandoning the cause altogether, possibly buying a few more years of mining operation and avoiding the fatal decision of the Michigan Tax Tribunal in 1974.

⁶³ Ibid⁶⁴ Ibid

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